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DIRECTORATE OF BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK 2009-2015

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Foreword

The Gambia government has always committed itself to the provision of relevant and quality education for all its citizenry. This is manifested in the relentless effort by government in making education accessible to every child including disadvantaged groups such as the poor, people with disabilities and girls.

Education policies have been affecting all cadres of education in The Gambia including children with special needs. The Education Policy 2004 – 2015 unequivocally guarantees access to relevant and quality education to all Gambian children regardless of their location, gender, religion, ability, or disability conditions. The building of schools across the country, combined with large-scale teacher training and curriculum reforms in the school system, has gone a long way towards making the aims of Education for All a reality. These strategies have enabled the sector to register increments in enrolment rates at the lower basic level and transition into secondary schools which is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade.

A series of efforts has also been made by government, civil society organizations (NGOs, FBOs and CBOs) and international agencies to address the learning needs of disabled children. However, most of this group of children do not have access to education. Those that are enrolled whether in specialized or mainstream schools continue to encounter challenges because of the inappropriateness of the curriculum, pedagogical practices and facilities to cater for their diverse learning needs.

For the provision of education in The Gambia to be meaningful it will have to create a supportive policy environment which will ensure appropriate facilities, adequate resources, improved pedagogues and differentiated curricula.

It is against this backdrop that this policy framework is being proposed to map out an agenda for inclusive and special needs education thus reinforcing the efforts of government as spelt out in the Education Policy 2004 - 2015 to achieve quality education for children with special needs. The provisions, according to this framework, will be guided by the underlying principles of inclusiveness, non-discrimination, individuality and active participation in education for Gambian children.

The framework maps out the important role of government as the key player in the provision of education to special needs children. It also underlines the significance of collaboration among disabled people's organizations as well as other stakeholders in putting resources and ideas together for the education of special needs children, at ECD, LBS and secondary levels. It further underscores the fact that all these efforts have to be backed by a suitable curriculum, highly trained and skilled teachers, resource centres and adequate resources for both special schools and mainstream schools.

It is my hope that this policy framework will achieve its desired objective of creating access and encouraging inclusiveness, non-discrimination, individuality and participation of all children with special needs for a better Gambia.

.....
Baboucarr Bouy
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| CREDITD | Curriculum Research, Evaluation, Development and In-Service Training Directorate |
| DPO | Disabled People's Organization |
| MOBSE | Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education |
| DOSH&SW | Department of State for Health and Social Welfare |
| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| EFA | Education for All |
| EFANET | Education for All Network Campaign The Gambia |
| FAWEGAM | Forum for African Women Educationalists - Gambia Chapter |
| FDP | Foundation for Disabled Persons |
| GADHOH | Gambia Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing |
| GAPD | Gambia Association of the Physically Disabled |
| GFD | Gambia Federation of the Disabled |
| GNPA | Gambia National Paralympics Association |
| GOLD | Gambia Organization for Learning Difficulties |
| GOVI | Gambia Organization for the Visually Impaired |
| GPF | Gambia Police Force |
| GSIAE | General Secretariat for Islamic and Arabic Education |
| HTC | Higher Teachers' Certificate |
| IEP | Integrated Education Programme |
| LBS | Lower Basic Schools |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NUDY | National Union of Disabled Youths |
| POP/FLE | Population and Family Life Education |
| PTC | Primary Teachers' Certificate |
| RSOD | Rural Support Organization for the Disabled |

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Definition of Terms

A useful working term in the context of this policy is *special educational needs*, which, according to the UN definition, refers to a child having ‘special educational needs’, if he/she has:

- a learning requirement that is significantly different from the majority of children of the same age; or
- a disability which prevents or hinders him/her from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of his/her age in provided schools.

Other Concepts of Special Education

Several other related concepts are used in describing such groups of people. These concepts include the following:

1 Impairment

Impairment is a physical, intellectual, mental or sensory characteristic or condition, which places limitations on an individual’s personal or social functioning in comparison with someone who does not have that characteristic or condition.

2 Disability

Disability is a term which, in relation to an individual, describes a functional limitation (for performing tasks, skills and behaviour) which he or she may have arising from physical, intellectual or sensory impairment, medical conditions or mental illness. Such impairments, conditions or illnesses may be permanent or transitory in nature. The above definition is founded on the “medical” model of disability. (*Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*, UNESCO).

International Convention on the rights of persons with Disabilities defines persons with disabilities to include “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

3 Handicap

Handicap is a loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others. It describes the encounter between the person with a disability and the environment.

4 Special Needs

Special needs are conditions or factors that hinder normal learning and development of individuals. The hindrance is a life-long condition that does not allow proper progress of an individual because of factors like disabilities, social, emotional, economic, health and other conditions. These conditions are also referred to as barriers to learning and development. The barriers can be environmental, congenital or both.

5 Special Needs Education

Special needs education is an education system which provides appropriate modifications in curricula, teaching methods, teaching/learning resources, and medium of communication in order to meet the individual special educational needs of children. It is learner-centred, flexible and adjustable to individual needs and potentials. This term was originally referred to as *special education*.

Therefore special needs education will be ensured through this policy for all children's mental, physical and social challenges that interfere with their ability to learn regardless of labels given them.

6 Inclusion

Inclusion is seen as **a process** of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is

the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (*Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*, UNESCO).

7 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education (or inclusive learning) refers to the inclusion and teaching of all children in formal or non-formal learning environments without regard to gender, physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, cultural, religious, or other characteristics.

8 Life Skills

Life Skills are abilities for adoptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO). They are skills needed to deal with psychological and health issues affecting us daily e.g. decision making skills, - self awareness, problem solving skills, empathy, etc.

9 Livelihood Skills

These are skills we acquire to prepare us to obtain and maintain satisfying work opportunities in order to earn a living such as carpentry, welding, or gardening.

1

Introduction

In order to address the needs of children with special needs, they must be identified, diagnosed and helped to have access to education. There is always the need to understand the exact dynamics and magnitude of the problem. The study and reports of the National Disability Survey 1998 both at the household and school levels has been the first of its kind to look at key areas. The study and the current education policy and the strategy to achieve education for all goals could be regarded as a yardstick to expedite the Special Needs Education and Inclusive Policy Framework.

Persons with disabilities in The Gambia, especially women and children, are considered to be among the poorest. Their condition is believed to be aggravated by mythical, social and cultural beliefs about people in society who have disabilities. Social condescending attitudes reinforce tendencies to exclude them from benefiting in many social development programmes.

The development of any country is determined by the quality of life of its inhabitants. The population obviously includes children with special needs. The Gambia must therefore be committed to cater for the diverse needs of these children so as to make them independent and productive members of society.

Despite the limited availability of formal institutions to cater for this group, the Education Policy 2004-2015 is making its own contribution towards the promotion and provision of special needs education in The Gambia. Special needs education is not an issue for only schools and teachers who look after children with disabilities but also a whole-system approach that touches on the whole nation in its drive to include everybody in every aspect of responsible civic life. The Education Policy calls for a radical and holistic change of attitudes and misconceptions about persons with disabilities to ensure that they too have access to relevant and quality education.

The Education Policy 2004 - 2015 outlines the relevance of early identification, assessment and appropriate placement for any child who may have special educational needs and will work with government departments and other agencies to facilitate a coordinated and holistic approach to both assessment and intervention. Despite these policy pronouncements, there are still no educational assessment centres in the country to assess children's needs before placement in school.

The Education Policy 2004 - 2015 outlines that children with mild- to- moderate special needs will be integrated into regular schools with appropriate supportive services. Those whose status is severe will be enrolled in special schools which will serve as resource centres.

- Appropriate assessment will be conducted for all categories of special needs children to determine appropriate health care interventions.
- Appropriate assessment will be conducted by a multi-disciplinary team for all categories of special needs children to determine appropriate placement for educational interventions.
- Special needs children with who can cope will be educated within the existing school system and adequate resources put in place to make schools more accessible.
- Children with severe special needs will be educated in special schools with opportunities to go to regular schools.

The Gambia College is the main teacher training institute in the country responsible for the training of different cadres of the school system in the country. The training and supply of teachers is the largest single item in the College's programmes. The University of The Gambia has also been engaged in the training on school management for head teachers and other senior teachers of schools.

There is a need to define the regulation on physical structural development in schools to ensure easy accessibility. Lack of reliable information does impact on planning,

development and provision of appropriate services and structures relevant to special needs persons.

The Life Skill Education Programme is an important component for special needs children. They need to be equipped with life and livelihood skills as early as entry into pre-school education. This will enable them to make decisions that promote their independence, introduce them to daily living skills, e.g. washing up, eating, dressing up and introduce them to personal hygiene. It also exposes them to issues related to skills acquisition for future job opportunities and career training.

The Education Policy 2004 – 2015 has made provisions for the establishment of resource centres to support the special needs programmes. As an ongoing programme, financing of the policy framework for sustainable development and poverty reduction is the responsibility of government. However, partners also have an important role to support the policy direction.

Government will create the necessary enabling environment for more players and better coordination of services and subsequently take over the roles played by individual philanthropists and organizations for the disabled in providing education to special needs children at all levels.

Policy development process: Efforts were made even with limited resources to make the process participatory. A Technical Working Group on Special Needs proposed the setting up of a task team to write a draft policy framework. The draft produced by the task team was then reviewed by the Technical Working Group and shared at a wider multi-sectoral gathering. This group further reviewed the draft and proposed improvements which were incorporated. This document therefore reflects the views of a wider spectrum of stakeholders and interest groups working in the special needs area.

2

Background to the Special Needs Education and Inclusive Policy Framework

2.1 International Legal Frameworks

- 1 The recognition of persons with disabilities as human beings with full and equal rights evolved slowly during the decades preceding the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). However, the Declaration itself as well as the 1966 International Bill of Rights (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR]) did not make explicit pronouncements on the rights of persons with disabilities.
- 2 The 1971 General Assembly Resolution on the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons noted that such persons enjoy the same rights as all other persons (Article 1). Other relevant declarations are the 1975 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons and the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (WPA) adopted by the General Assembly in 1982. This programme tackled prevention of disability and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities; but, significantly, this resolution also dealt with human rights by discussing the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- 3 The other landmark resolution of the United Nations referencing the human rights of persons with disabilities was the 1993 United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (SR). These are the rules that guide the actions of states on matters of equalizing the opportunities of persons with disabilities, thus outlining the following requisite key steps:
 - Preconditions for equal participation (awareness-raising, medical care, rehabilitation and support services (Rules 1-4)

- Target areas for equal participation (accessibility, education, employment, income maintenance and social security, family life and personal integrity, culture, recreation and sports and religion (Rules 5-12))
- Implementation measures (information and research, policy-making and planning, legislation, economic policies, coordination of work, organizations of persons with disabilities, personnel training, national monitoring and evaluation of disability programmes in the implementation of the Rules, technical and economic cooperation and international cooperation (Rules 13-22))
- Monitoring mechanisms

4 The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 (Para 64): *“The place of disabled persons is everywhere. Persons with disabilities should be guaranteed equal opportunity through the elimination of all socially determined barriers ... which exclude or restrict full participation in society.”* The Vienna Declaration further stresses that *“special attention needs to be paid to ensure non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by disabled persons”*. These special measures entail conscious and deliberate efforts and programmes aimed at identifying and removing those barriers that would otherwise impede effective realization and enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities.

5 Finally, in 2001, the United Nations General Assembly resolved to establish an Ad - Hoc Committee to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ICRPD) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006; and it confirmed the rights model as the way forward on issues of disability.

6 *The Convention on the Rights of the Child*

- **Article 2.1:** “States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of

any kind, irrespective to the child's or his or her parents....disability...or other status".

- **Article 23** addresses their special needs: "States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community".
- The rights of girls or boys with disabilities are not limited to aspects raised in Article 23; every article that refers to 'the child' also applies to the child with disabilities. Children with disabilities should be given the same opportunity to enjoy an adequate standard of living. They have the right to play, the right to survival and development, the right to express opinions in matters affecting them, the right to a family, a name and a nationality, but also the right to access education, health care, rehabilitation services and preparation for employment.

7 Other international conventions and declarations which recognize the right of children with disabilities include:

- the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975)
- the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1983)
- the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disability (1993)
- the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policies and Practices in Special Needs Education (1994)

2.2 Legislative and Policy Framework on the Right to Education for Persons With Disabilities in The Gambia

1 The 1997 Constitution

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution of The Gambia makes provision, in Section 30, for the right to education of all persons: "*All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realization of that right...*"

The Constitution also makes specific reference to the rights of people with disabilities. Section 31 (2) protects people with disabilities against discrimination and exploitation, *'in particular as regards access to health services, education and employment'*. While Section 33, the anti-discrimination clause in the Constitution, outlaws discrimination, categories of groups listed for non-discrimination do not include persons with disabilities.

2 The Children's Act 2005

The Children's Act 2005, which domesticates the CRC and other child-related international legal instruments to which The Gambia is a State Party, emphasizes the core welfare principle of best interest of the child in determining any question concerning a child. It reiterates, in Section 18 (1) the right of every child "to free and compulsory basic education and it shall be the duty of Government to provide the education." In Section 18 (2) the Act obligates every parent or guardian to "ensure that his or her child or ward attends and completes basic education." In Section 12, the Act makes specific reference to the right of a child in need of special protection measures, which includes children with disabilities.

3

Situational Analysis

3.1 Population

- 1 Persons with disabilities in The Gambia, especially women and children, are considered to be among the poorest. Their conditions seem to be aggravated by mythical, social and cultural beliefs held by society about people with disabilities. Social condescending attitudes reinforce tendencies to exclude them from benefiting in many social development programmes.
- 2 According to the findings of the 1998 National Disability Survey, the national prevalence rate of disability is 16 per 1000 population or 1.6 per cent with gender differentials of 17.4 and 13.9 per 1000 population for males and females respectively. Though not significant, there are differentials in the urban and rural prevalence rates. That is 12.5 and 17.6 per 1000 population respectively. At the national level, 12 per cent of the households reported having disabled persons. Age differentials in disability are however significant. The survey also reveals that the likelihood of having disability increases with age. The 2003 national census indicates that the prevalent rate has increased to 2.4 per cent.

3.2 Services for Children with Special Needs

Special needs education is ensured by DOSBSE through religious organizations, NGOs and DPOs. These institutions are supported by several disabled persons organizations (DPOs). Prominent stakeholders include:

- The Gambia Organization for the Visually Impaired (GOVI)
- The Gambia Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GADHOH)
- The Gambia Organization for Learning Difficulties (GOLD)
- The Gambia Association of the Physically Disabled (GAPD)
- The National Union of Disabled Youths (NUDY)

- The Rural Support for the Disabled (RSOD)
- The Gambia National Paralympics Association (GNPA)
- The Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD), which is the umbrella body for organization of the disabled. It also serves as a mouthpiece for the DPOs.

Provisions by these stakeholders are in the form of sensitisation and advocacy of day special schools, boarding respite care and integration into regular schools.

Presently, in The Gambia there are few formal special resource centres providing educational services to children with disabilities. These centres cater for those who are visually impaired, hard of hearing and have learning difficulties.

List of Institutions Providing Services for Special Needs Children

| | Institution | Services provided | Level | Location |
|---|--|---|--------------------------|----------|
| 1 | GOVI Resource Centre | Blind and visually impaired | Pre-school & Lower Basic | Region 1 |
| 2 | St John's School for the Deaf | Hearing impaired | Pre-school & Basic Cycle | Region 1 |
| 3 | Methodist School for Learning Difficulties | Learning difficulties | Lower Basic Cycle | Region 1 |
| 4 | GADHOH | Hearing impaired | Pre-school | Region 1 |
| 5 | Home for Children with Learning Difficulties | Severe learning difficulties | Respite care | Region 2 |
| 6 | Foundation for the Disabled | Tricycles and wheelchairs and computer literacy | Adults and children | Region 1 |

3.3. Government Intervention

Special needs education is also an issue in the education sector policy for 2004 to 2015. It sets out a number of strategies to ensure inclusion of children with special needs and includes:

- 1 Advocacy and sensitization to foster positive attitudes and address misconceptions regarding persons with disabilities and also ensure access to relevant and quality education.
- 2 Integration of blind and low vision children through the Integrated Education Programme for Blind and Low Vision Children (IEP) in three regions of the country.
- 3 Integration of hearing impaired children through an itinerant teaching programme for the deaf in Region 1.
This has enabled the training of thirteen itinerant teachers who cater for the needs of children with visual impairment and one teacher for hearing impairment
- 4 Development of a training module in special needs for pre-service teachers at Gambia College
- 5 Provision of buses for special schools
- 6 Provision of an assessment centre for hearing impaired children
- 7 Provision of a braille printing press
- 8 Provision of braille machines and papers
- 9 Development of a training manual on special needs education
- 10 Inclusion of special needs children in mainstream schools

The Gambia College, which is the main teacher training institute in the country and responsible for training teachers of the different cadres of the school system, has through the School of Education trained dozens of students for special needs institutions:

- Five hearing impaired students have been trained at the Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC) level
- Three visually impaired students have undergone training at the Higher Teachers' Certificate (HTC) level
- Three physically challenged students in wheelchairs have been trained at the

PTC level

- At least ten physically challenged students on crutches have been trained at both the HTC and PTC levels
- A few other teachers with special needs conditions have been trained in the ECD Programme
- Institutions such as St John's School for the Deaf, Methodist School for Learning Difficulties and GOVI Resource Centre for the Blind have benefited from the posting of trained teachers.

3.4 Gaps in the Provision of Special Needs

Despite the efforts of existing non-governmental organizations in providing services in their local communities and government through the Education Policy 2004-2015 there are still serious challenges to be addressed. These are as follows:

- 1 Few schools make provisions for inclusion, thus making most schools inaccessible to children with special needs
- 2 All special needs schools are located in the urban and semi-urban areas of Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC) and Western Region and are only able to cater for a small proportion of children who need special education. Distance and cost are therefore important challenges
- 3 Inadequate resources and capacity limit the abilities of stakeholders to provide quality services to children and to extend their services to all parts of the country.
- 4 Unavailability of an operational policy on special needs at national, school and other service delivery level
- 5 Inappropriate physical infrastructure (absence of, eg, ramps and gutters) which hinder easy mobility of children with special needs at all levels of educational institutions
- 6 Unavailability of critical services including identification and assessment of children with special needs for appropriate placement
- 7 Inadequate or no specialized training for teachers handling children with special needs
- 8 Inadequate specialized teaching and learning materials

9 The Education Policy 2004 – 2015 is silent on the strategies that will ensure the inclusion of children with special needs in the goal to “increase the completion rates in basic education to 100% by 2015”.

Addressing these challenges comprehensively requires developing the kind of policy directions being proposed here.

4

Why Invest in Special Needs Education?

The Education Policy 2004 – 2015 aims to provide relevant, quality and accessible education to every Gambian child regardless of their gender, ethnicity, ability or geographical locations. This is an excellent drive towards bringing about equity given the fact that The Gambia is a signatory to the Charter of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which explicitly guarantees the right to education by all children. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) also spell out the rights of persons with disabilities.

This is why the Education Policy aims to respond to the diversity of children in The Gambia in a bid to providing for all of them in an inclusive setting as much as possible. This is principally because it has been proven right that inclusion is a solution to segregation and continuous marginalization of children who are educationally challenged.

Inclusive strategies and resources serve “able” children, special needs children, teachers and parents. *Inclusive education* as a concept raises awareness that everyone has unique potentials which, if tapped, could harness the progress of the individual as well as society.

One of the goals of both the EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the achievement of universal primary education that “ensures that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.”

It is against this background that both legal and policy pronouncements such as this one have expressed the need to demonstrate the willingness to respect the dignity of persons and to provide for all children. Ensuring investment through this policy

framework in particular means investing in special needs education for children will enable the nation to:

- 1 Nurture independence and productivity among children with special needs
- 2 Create equal educational opportunities for children with special needs
- 3 Reduce the incidence of street begging as a result of disability
- 4 Reduce cases of delinquency
- 5 Minimize abuse and exploitation of disabled children
- 6 Trigger higher life chances
- 7 Promote the participation of persons with special needs in the decision making process
- 8 Increase life expectancy
- 9 Promote mainstreaming in society
- 10 Reduce forced or early marriages

5

Principles, Aims and Objectives of the Special Needs Education and Inclusive Policy Framework

5.1 Principles Underlying the Policy Framework

The implementation of the policy framework will be guided by the principles of:

- Inclusiveness
- Non-discrimination
- Individuality
- Participation
- Performance

5.2 Aims of the Policy Framework

The main aims of this operational framework are to:

- Increase opportunities for children with special needs to access quality education
- Improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities

5.3 Objectives of the Policy Framework

The specific objectives of the operational policy are to:

- Increase government participation in the provision of special needs as a major duty bearer for education
- Provide an appropriate learning environment that promotes inclusion
- Ensure adequate funding for the provision of special needs

6

Policy Priorities

Early identification, assessment and placement will be given priority in this operational policy.

6.1 Early Identification

The Education Policy 2004 - 2015 outlines the relevance of early identification, assessment and appropriate placement for any child who may have special educational needs, and states the intention with other government departments and other agencies to facilitate a coordinated and holistic approach to both assessment and intervention.

Lessons from studies of brain development support this stance. These studies suggest that the first eight years in life are crucial in human development. It is established by research that critical brain development including intelligence occurs before the age of 7. Also most of the growth of the brain cells and structuring of neural connections in the brain take place during the first two years of life.

Apart from genetic transmission, negative environmental factors such as exposure to hazards from waste, difficulties in child birth, disease, maternal and child malnutrition, drug abuse, premature births and inappropriate or inadequate stimulation, accidents have a determining effect on the development of special needs, which may occur before birth, during delivery or after birth.

Because of the high degree of elasticity of the brain in the first eight years of life, the ECD stage offers an opportunity for the prevention, correction and maintenance of special needs cases. As a result, priority will be given to early assessment, identification, classification and intervention.

All children will be screened at birth and during infancy to identify potential risk and relevant intervention. The Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses is a cost-effective window of opportunity for screening and assessing babies during the first two years. Also upon entry into ECD programmes all children will be screened and an assessment carried out to establish eligibility for support.

The following strategic activities will be implemented:

- Relevant pre-school programmes will be provided to children with special needs. These programmes will integrate health care, protection, safe water, sanitation, food and nutrition and intellectual, social and emotional stimulation. The curriculum will be specifically designed to provide balanced experiences in the area of personal, social and emotional development, numeracy, literacy and knowledge about the world. In the initial stage, strong emphasis will be laid on ensuring personal social development that will promote the later attainment of developmental skills
- Continually assess young children's progress and make appropriate interventions
- Help promote parenting practices that support children's development through parenting education programmes
- Provision of management guides

6.2 Individual Child Assessment

Individual child assessment, which provides information on the developmental level of children, will be used to identify, classify and make decisions about effective programmes/plans, referrals, appropriate placement and support for children with special needs. Centres will be identified or established for the purpose of assessment. A framework will be developed and institutionalized to guide assessment processes.

Assessment will be carried out at all levels by specialists such as doctors, psychologists, audiologists, speech and language therapists, and special needs education teachers.

6.3 Placement

- 1 Children requiring special care will be placed in programmes/institutions/schools that can successfully provide the appropriate services according to their special needs where the needs could be met in regular schools and they will be mainstreamed.
- 2 Mainstream institutions enrolling children with special needs will respond to their individual needs without discrimination. These institutions will ensure their educational needs by providing appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, itinerant teaching, resource use and partnership with parents and communities.
- 3 Specially trained teachers will ensure the specific support children with special needs require. To ensure the mass of personnel required to ensure that children with special needs have access to instructional support, itinerant teaching will be used as a key strategy for ensuring the effective use of personnel in mainstream pre-schools, basic and secondary schools. Such personnel will have responsibility for a group of children across schools. Allocation and recruitment of teachers will be determined by the number of children requiring special needs services within the school or cluster.
- 4 Management guidelines will be developed to ensure the effective management of services provided to children with special needs.

Key Strategies for Policy Implementation

The key strategies through which the policy aims and objectives will be realized are:

7.1 Creating Opportunities for Access to Educational Services

The Policy Education 2004 - 2015 states that children with mild-to-moderate special needs will be integrated into regular schools with appropriate supportive services. Those that have severe special educational needs will be enrolled in special schools which will serve as resource centres.

- Appropriate assessment will be conducted for all categories of special needs children to determine appropriate health interventions.
- Appropriate assessment will be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team for all categories of special needs children to determine appropriate placement for educational interventions.
- Children with moderate special educational needs will be educated within the existing school system and adequate resources will be put in place to make schools more accessible.
- Children with severe special educational needs will be educated in special schools with opportunities to go to regular schools later.

7.2 Provision of Specialized Materials and Support Services

For children with special needs to benefit from education, availability of specialized materials is crucial. To achieve this, the following requirements are necessary:

- Schools will be made more accessible to cater for the diverse needs of children with special needs through adequate provisions of specialized materials.
- Provide adequate and appropriate support services, beginning at the pre-school level, to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities in the existing system.

- Provide a range of alternative modes of education for school age children to include accommodation in inclusive programmes, temporary resource classrooms, special classes, itinerant teacher service, specialized units and special schools.

7.3 Curriculum Reform

A review of the curriculum of the school system is an important step towards achieving the aspiration of the policy.

The guiding principles of the education sector policy are a “non-discriminatory and all-inclusive provision of education underlining, in particular, gender equity and targeting of the poor and the disadvantaged groups.” Non-discriminatory delivery of education calls for a truly inclusive curriculum. This has been a big challenge for the sector. This is because the curriculum contents, material resources, proposed pedagogies and assessment procedures are all meant for normal children. They do not cater for special needs children. Nor are teachers fully trained in handling special needs children. Consequently, when they are faced with the task of providing for special needs children in mainstream schools, they fall back on inappropriate teaching strategies, thereby excluding these children from the excitement of teaching and learning.

The Policy states that “there will be ongoing review and upgrading of the curricula across basic and secondary levels based on explicit learning objectives.” It would be appropriate to develop it further to improve the aspects of it in a bid to make it more responsive to the needs of diverse learners such as those with special needs. As a matter of priority, such strategies should focus on the following:

- 1 The curriculum should be reviewed and adapted under the guidance of CREDITD, the Special Needs Unit of DOSBSE and other stakeholders.
- 2 The goals and philosophy of a revised curriculum should reinforce those of the Education Policy in matters of providing education for all children in The Gambia.
- 3 The curriculum should outline specific teaching and learning guidelines for students with special needs in both special and mainstream schools with proper sequencing of contents and pedagogies focusing on the varying abilities of children.

- 4 The curriculum should be more flexible with a lot of hands-on and tactile content and resources which will benefit all categories of learners.
- 5 The curriculum should open up a window of opportunity for parents with special needs children to be comfortable in enrolling their children in mainstream schools, with the confidence that there are materials and pedagogical support services for them. This will encourage people to send their disabled children to regular schools rather than to special schools in the urban areas or in the streets for begging.
- 6 There is a need for training in curriculum differentiation in the school in general and classroom in particular in relation to the tastes, abilities and aptitudes of diverse learners using age-appropriate and ability-appropriate to the teaching strategies and resources.
- 7 There is the need for Individualised Student Assessment to provide information on the developmental level of children to identify, classify and make decisions about effective programmes/plans, referral, appropriate placement and support for children

7.4 Teacher Training

The current arrangements require that all students in the HTC and PTC programmes do a module in special education. The PTC programme also has a distance education module in special education.

In order to respond to the goals of the Education Policy 2004 – 2015, the following are important considerations for implementation in teacher training:

- Develop a tailor-made training programme for special needs teachers in Gambian schools by preparing them to actively support the learning needs of special needs children.
- The Gambia College should make dramatic changes in the teacher training mode by making both content and pedagogy responsive to the needs of both normal and special needs students.
- The strengthening of studies in the life and livelihood skills components and disciplines such as Arts and Crafts, Home Management, Sports and Recreation are areas that would interest special needs pupils to enrol for professional development

in teacher training.

- Establish and strengthen a Special Education Unit at the Gambia College to take care of special needs curriculum matters and deliver support services and resources to trainees and teachers intending to pursue a career in special education.

7.5 Enhancing the Accessibility of Services

There is a need to define the regulation on physical structural development in schools to ensure easy accessibility. Lack of reliable information has all impact on the planning, development and provision of appropriate services and structures relevant to special needs persons.

- There will be continuous advocacy and awareness creation to ensure that formulating regulations take into consideration the needs of persons with disabilities at all levels.
- The relevant sectors will mobilize the required resources to include ramps, special toiletries and appropriate changes where necessary.
- Provide technical aids to facilitate movement, hearing and visual needs of children to ensure equal opportunities for participation.

7.6 Advocacy

As a reflection of the past work in this area, there will be the need for continuous strive to meet the needs of special needs children nationwide to ensure:

- 1 Continuous advocacy and awareness creation for the required resource mobilization and the political will be a prerequisite for investment in this area.
- 2 Parents and communities' knowledge about special needs grow to promote a positive attitudinal change for special needs.
- 3 Awareness creation is a critical tool for preventing and managing disability conditions.
- 4 A comprehensive communication strategy using the ECD Parenting Education Manual for an effective advocacy programme for special needs children.

- 5 Those diverse needs of children with special needs are met, and collaborative mechanisms are put in place to strengthen and build partnerships among stakeholders.
- 6 The multi-sectoral working group set up for the coordination of special needs will become a permanent structure with regional linkages to facilitate partnership building and strengthen provision at the grassroots level.
- 7 Mobilizing the critical mass of expertise and resources required for the successful implementation of the policy.
- 8 Regional and National Posting Committees consider the transfer of trained special needs education teachers to appropriate schools.

7.7 Research

- 1 There is a need to define different functions and types of information on special needs to enable teachers to target resources where they are most required. Lack of reliable information has an impact on the planning, development and provision of services and meaningful strategies for prevention as well as providing the necessary environment for mainstreaming and equalization of opportunities.
- 2 In all data collection on special needs, it is important to ensure that any information gathered is of relevance to inclusive development and planning to include access to the curricula, the physical environment, teaching and learning materials and general inequalities.
- 3 The National Population and Housing Census 2003 provided information on the number of persons with disabilities by category while other precise studies on special needs have captured extensive information on issues affecting the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools, attitudes and levels of education attained.

- 4 However, all studies have their individual limitations, especially in conducting scientific tests and the duration of the disability. As a rare occurrence, it is perhaps better to conduct specialized household surveys to establish the real number of disabled persons nationally.
- 5 Over the years, there has been less coordination between disability and other social development as most research related to disability gives more attention to the health model of disability than to the social model. Research and studies related to special needs and disabilities should therefore focus on the social model.
- 6 Research in disability needs to be person-centred to address performance problems and as a human rights and developmental issues leading to an understanding that persons with disabilities are equal citizens and should enjoy equal rights and responsibilities and that every individual's needs form the basis for planning.
- 7 Research processes are as important as the findings, and each issue of disability is equally appreciated by giving due attention to quality and participation.
- 8 Giving information on the lives and living conditions of persons with disabilities cannot be everyone's responsibility. Rather, government should take the lead and create a conducive environment in disseminating information at national and regional levels.
- 9 Information on disability targeting all possible formats including education, personal health and social aspects affecting the lives of special needs children must be made available.

7.8 Creating Opportunities for Life and Livelihood Skills

Life skills are an important component for special needs children. These children need to be equipped with life and livelihood skills as early as the commencement of pre-school education. This will enable them to make decisions that promote their

independence, introduce them to daily living skills (eg washing up, eating, dressing up) and to personal hygiene. It will also expose them to issues related to skills acquisition for future job opportunities and career training. To achieve this:

- Life Skills Education Programme (HIV/AIDS Preventive Education, Gender responsiveness, POP/FLE, Guidance and Counselling, Peace Building , Tolerance and Patriotism) will be embedded in the curriculum of special needs children with appropriate adaptation to meet their learning needs
- Children with special needs will be exposed to the different options in life and guided to make good decisions in life
- Skills and vocational training will be provided for special needs students as appropriate
- Encourage extracurricular activities that will promote skills acquisition and mastering the promotion of career development.

7.9 Provision of Care and Support

The provision of care and support for children with special needs is crucial to their holistic development. A conscious effort should be made to meet their physical, psycho-social and spiritual well-being as this will help improve their life and promote positive attitudes and raise their self- esteem. In order to achieve this:

- Sensitization will be conducted to raise parents, teachers and communities' awareness (through literacy centres and other forms) on the importance of support for special needs children to meet their physical, psycho-social and spiritual development
- Parents and teachers will be sensitized to issues related to child protection and how to respond to protection issues
- Facilitate nutritional support for special needs children including access to the school feeding programme.

7.10 Gender Mainstreaming

Enrolment in schools has increased significantly over the years, especially for girls. However, there are disparities in enrolment, retention and performance engendered by traditional beliefs and practices against girls, especially those with special needs. In view of this, gender issues and concerns will be mainstreamed at every stage of the education process for children with special needs for the realization of education for all, gender parity and equity goals. These will include:

- Creating opportunities for children with special needs
- Establishing high retention performance and completion rates, especially for girls
- Improving performance and participation for both boys and girls
- Making special needs schools 'child friendly'
- Providing enough special needs teachers

8

Institutional Framework for Policy Implementation

8.1 The Role of the Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education

The role of DOSBSE through its relevant unit will ensure timely implementation of this policy framework. In a similar vein, it will mobilize resources for programme implementation as it has committed itself in the Education Policy and Strategic Plan and other education instruments. The responsibility of DOSBSE will include the following:

- 1 Provide and review strategic direction for special educational needs.
- 2 Ensure all pupils have access to a broad, balanced, relevant and appropriately differentiated curriculum.
- 3 Ensure that the appropriate legislation for enrolment and placement in mainstream schools for special needs children is in place and adhered to.
- 4 Ensure a barrier-free environment in all schools.
- 5 Collect and maintain data on special needs for future planning.
- 6 Ensure that there are sufficient places for special needs children while meeting their individual needs.
- 7 Train teachers in special needs and inclusive education.
- 8 Design appropriate curricular and teaching materials.
- 9 Provide appropriate specification for equipment, furniture, infrastructure and technical aids.
- 10 Monitor the quality for service provision.
- 11 Allocate resources against a consistent and transparent formula for efficient and effective use.
- 12 Facilitate transfer arrangement between schools for pupils with special needs.
- 13 Develop and maintain partnership links with other agencies to support special needs pupils.
- 14 Provide guidance and support for an appropriate placement to pupils outside their

chronological age group.

- 15 Provide direct educational cost and support in higher institutions.
- 16 Provide special schools to serve as resource centres and to support profoundly special needs children.
- 17 Ensure that children are protected against violence and other forms of cruelty leading to disability.
- 18 Put in place modalities for the promotion and career development of special needs teachers.
- 19 Provide a school feeding programme to special schools

8.2 The Role of the Department of State for Health and Social Welfare

The role of DOSH&SW through its relevant units and programmes will ensure the timely provision of support services to needy children through the following:

- 1 Conduct medical assessment of children to determine type and degree of disability including provision of certification.
- 2 Support teacher training endeavour.
- 3 Ensure that standards are met, especially on issues related to the prevention of disability.
- 4 Ensure that vaccination against communicable disease, health, education, proper child rearing and improved nutrition are available.
- 5 Ensure that children are protected against violence and other forms of cruelty leading to disability.
- 6 Ensure free medical assessment and treatment for children with special needs.
- 7 Ensure the provision of technical aids (eg prosthetics, orthotics, wheelchairs, crutches, braces and mobility canes) to special needs children.
- 8 Ensure that children with special needs are not neglected and abused.

8.3 The Role of the Police Force

The Gambia Police Force will ensure that proper measures are in place to prevent and minimize road accidents.

8.4 The Role of Civil Societies and Other Stakeholders

The role of all stakeholders in any policy formulation and implementation is crucial. As civil societies mostly complement government's efforts in the development circles, they also serve as a regulator and mouthpiece for the vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society.

Members of civil societies are also advocates for better changes in issues that affect the above group. Through the Special Education and Inclusive Policy Framework, representatives and civil societies will:

- 1 Support in the provision of services to special needs children.
- 2 Support and conduct teacher training programmes.
- 3 Advocate standards to be acquired and maintained.
- 4 Ensure that all children are enrolled and maintained in school.
- 5 Support communities to develop positive attitudes to the education of children with special needs.
- 6 Support and monitor programmes on special needs education.
- 7 Support communities to develop positive attitudes to the education of children with special needs.

9

Financing of the Policy Framework

The Education Policy 2004 – 2015 has made provisions for the establishment of resource centres to support special needs programmes. As an ongoing programme, financing of the policy framework for sustainable development and poverty reduction is the responsibility of government. However partners have an important role to support the policy direction.

Government will create the necessary enabling environment for more players and better coordination of services and subsequently take over the roles played by individual philanthropists and disabled organizations in providing education to special needs children at all levels.

10

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy Framework

Monitoring and evaluation is an essential element for all human rights issues. Monitoring and evaluation can be a corrective tool against the violated rights of persons with disabilities and can measure progress made and obstacles faced at the implementation stage of an activity. It also measures the trends in discrimination for individuals and at universal levels.

Government will create the enabling environment for joint monitoring of the policy framework to ensure that activities planned are effectively implemented and that progress is monitored and evaluated.